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Summer camp weds cheerleading, technology

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Katelynn Lemke first started cheerleading in fifth grade and now makes a two-hour drive to practice three days a week.

At the Cheer in the Classroom summer camp, Lemke is combining her participation in cheerleading with her interest in technology.

"I'm interested in computer technology, and this has connected two things I love," said Lemke.

Cheer in the Classroom is a five-day program that ends today and is held at Purdue University for girls from seventh to 12th grades who are interested in cheerleading and technology.

The purpose of the camp, which is in its second year, is to use cheerleading as a tool to inform girls about the careers available in technology-related fields, said Christi Jacobs, a former Purdue cheerleader who started and runs the camp.

Jacobs said the camp contains many hands-on activities that relate back to a wide variety of majors, from computer and information technology to mechanical engineering.

For example, the camp finale introduces participants to programming while keeping the camp grounded in cheerleading.

"We have the middle school girls who are going to program a mini-robot and then they'll have to perform a dance with the robot, and we have the high-schoolers who are going to be programming a light show that's going to introduce the middle school girls when they perform their dance," said Jacobs.

She said that not only does she see the girls getting inspired firsthand, but research from the camp last year that formed part of her masters thesis for technology education backed up her initial reaction that the camp was getting through to the girls.

"I think the most rewarding thing was last year when I conducted my survey, my research came back and it was statistically significant that this camp was effective in that the girls found technology more interesting," said Jacobs.

"They thought they had a brighter future in technology-related fields."

Quinn DeVillers of Columbus, Ohio, said she was most interested in the Alice imaging program, which allows campers to formulate a cheer routine on a computer and then watch Purdue cheerleaders perform the same routine later.

"I've always liked going on the computer and doing Photoshop and stuff," said DeVillers, "but this is 10 times cooler than what I thought technology could be."